

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Blind and partially sighted people have been campaigning for the higher rate of mobility allowance under the Disability Living Allowance. We have already obtained a lot of support from MPs, but the Government are reluctant to allow us the higher rate, preferring to increase the budget for Access to Work, which provides equipment and other facilities to blind and partially sighted people in employment.

While there may be concessions on bus and other public transport through the provision of passes, many blind and partially sighted people cannot use public transport for various reasons. Many rural services are sparse to say the least, and even in towns it is often difficult to use public transport to get to exactly where you want. Therefore, taxis are the best option.

I know that London Cabbies are among the kindest, friendliest and most compassionate people on the face of the planet, and they would go to the ends of the earth to help anyone with a disability. As a totally blind person living in Buckinghamshire, which is not the easiest county to get around, I am asking all you splendid people to support our campaign. It would help us so much if we had this extra money so that we could travel more conveniently.

Please write to your MP and ask him to support the campaign. Ask him to tell the Minister for the Disabled that blind and partially sighted people have just as many, if not more, problems getting around as people with other disabilities. On 15 October there will be a rally at the House of Commons when blind and partially sighted people will be lobbying their MP's about this issue. It would be wonderful if some of you could join the rally and lend your support.

The Government may think that you are supporting the campaign because it will mean more profit for you, but we know it will be because you understand the difficulties of blind and partially sighted travellers and want to do all you can to help them.

Thank you for spending your time reading this. I hope cabbies will be happy to support our campaign.

You can find out more information about the campaign online at this URL:

<http://tinyurl.com/6lyjmh>

With many thanks and all good wishes
Wendy Sharpe

UNDER PRESSURE

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a major risk factor for heart disease, as it can damage the arteries and cause heart attacks and stroke. Often called the 'silent killer' because it can be symptomless, simple lifestyle changes can help reduce the risk of hypertension. Even if your blood pressure is normal, a healthy lifestyle can help prevent future problems.

- ♥ Eat less salt - choose natural rather than processed foods, which often contain hidden salt, and don't add salt at the table. Look on the packet for foods with less than 0.6g sodium, or 1.5g salt per 100g, as some foods, like cereals, bread and spreads contain large amounts.
- ♥ Eat 5 a day - fruit and veg contain potassium, which counters the effect of sodium. They're also low in fat, so help keep off the pounds!
- ♥ Limit alcohol as this increases blood pressure over time - try to keep to 3-4 units a day for men and 2-3 for women.
- ♥ Regular activity - 30 minutes a day for 5 days a week keep arteries flexible and helps maintain a healthy weight, which is also important in keeping blood pressure down.

So get your blood pressure checked, and remember, the best way to protect your heart and your body is to follow an active, healthy lifestyle. For more information and advice about healthy living, contact Heart Research UK on 0113 297 6206 or email lifestyle@heartresearch.org.uk

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON WESTERN EXTENSION

A five-week public consultation on the future of the Western Extension of the Congestion Charging zone began on 1st September 2008. The consultation was an election pledge made by Mayor Boris Johnson, who said: "Whenever I head to the west of our city I meet people with strong opinions on the Western Extension. But when my predecessor held a consultation on this important issue he completely ignored its results. Unlike him I have the utmost respect for the opinions of Londoners and I hope that thousands of them will take part in the consultation.

"I remain to be persuaded on exactly what we should do with the extension so this is a superb opportunity for anyone with an opinion to get involved and help influence my final decision. As well as the obvious options of keeping it or removing it, I would be very keen to know what Londoners think of suggestions such as having a charge-free period during the middle of the day."

Possible changes to the scheme include:

- Making the Congestion Charge easier to pay by introducing accounts (this would apply to the Western Extension and original charging zone)
- Introducing a charge-free period in the middle of the day in the Western Extension
- Increasing the residents' discount to 100 per cent (this would apply to the Western Extension and original charging zone).

If the Mayor wishes to remove or make significant changes to the way that the Western Extension operates, he would have to revise his Transport Strategy to reflect this. A further 12 week consultation would be necessary and provide a second opportunity for the public to express their views on the future of the Western Extension. TfL would also then need to consult the public and stakeholders on variations to the Congestion Charging Scheme Order before any changes could be implemented.

